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Autobiography as an Enhancement of the Relationship Between Student and Cooperating Teacher

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ABSTRACT

The student teaching experience often creates affective friction between the student and his supervisor which may have debilitating effects on the student's self-image and ultimate performance in the teaching role. This study reports on the formal evaluation of a technique (developed at Clark University) of sharing personal biography which aimed at building self-image, developing bonds of solidarity and improving in-class performance. Matched treatment and comparison groups of 10 pairs of students and teachers each were administered FIRO-B and COPE, pre and post. Student in-class performance was also rated by disinterested observers at the same times. The results support the effectiveness of the treatment in meeting its goals.

* * *

Sandefur and Adams (9) have shown that the student-teaching experience is an important determinant of values and styles in teaching and may have effects which extend into the second year of post-baccalaureate work. Edgar (2) has shown that affective friction is likely to develop between the student and his cooperating teacher which may have damaging consequences to

SP010 908

to the student's self-image and ego-strength. Problems resulting from the student teaching experience may result in the attrition of better students from the field (9) and have been shown by both Felker et.al. (3) and DeWitt (1) to contribute to rigidity and close-mindedness.

The National Survey of Student-Teaching conducted by Johnson (5) showed that the most frequent criterion used by institutions for selecting cooperating teachers was "willingness to have student teachers"; only 24% of the institutions reported that they considered human relations skills in their selection process.

Funk and Musgrave's (4) survey of student teaching at one midwestern university revealed that students wanted more orientation, guidance and encouragement from their cooperating teacher with the empahsis on evaluation for self-development. Loadman and Mahan (6), however, showed that teachers with rigid and dogmatic beliefs were not likely to provide students with these services.

Morris (7) argued that the student's university supervisor should fill this counseling role and act as a liason to remedy difficulties between student and cooperating teacher. Prokop (8), however reported that when this was the case, the student was often trapped in a conflict situation when the faculty supervisor and cooperating teacher has widely different conceptions of the role of the ideal teacher. This work seems to eliminate any simple management device (such as the supervisor) as a solution to problems in student teaching.

Thus, a need exists for the development of techniques for eliminating affective friction between the student and cooperating teacher. Although the magnitude of the problem is not exactly known, the National Survey of Student Teaching (5) showed that approximately 9% of the student teachers

(estimated to be about 13,000) had sufficient difficulty with their cooperating teacher to cause them to leave the field.

The Autobiography Technique

Through federal funds provided by the TTT program,[2] Clark University (Worcester, Massachusetts) developed a number of techniques aimed at facilitating the interaction of persons from Liberal Arts and Education departments. One of these, created by Irving Schwartz (of the Department of Education) involved the sharing of personal biography as a means to breaking down interpersonal barriers. Clark then received a grant to develop a Training Complex which integrated graduate, undergraduate, preservice, and inservice training. Difficulties between student and cooperating teachers led to adaptation of the autobiography technique to student teaching experiences, as follows:

From eight to ten pairs of student and cooperating teachers meet jointly for three hours in a weekly seminar for which both groups receive academic credit. The first three weeks are devoted to the structured revelation of personal biography:

Week 1: Each person in the group explains the content of his wallet (or purse) as an "ice-breaker."

Week 2: Each person prepares a collage which represents his life and explains it to the group.

Week 3: Each person explains the circumstances under which he became involved in the education profession and the motivational factors surrounding this involvement.

In each remaining week, each pair of student and cooperating teachers present their working situation and explain the roots (in their own personal history and experiences) for decisions made and actions chosen. The other members of the class contribute their own perceptions and experiences to

the discussion. The faculty member in charge of the activity acts to stimulate discussion and moderate emotional conflict.

This technique was quite well-received by the members of the Worcester educational community. In addition, Clark was selected as one of four exemplary TTT projects and the focus of an in-depth study. As one part of this study, the autobiography technique was selected for formal evaluation.

The author was the external evaluator for the entire study and conducted this particular work in cooperation with Irving Schwartz.

Methodology

Preparations for the study began in October of 1972, four months prior to the offering of the autobiography seminar in the next semester. A formal statement of the effects hypothesized for the autobiography treatment was prepared:

- Development of Solidarity: both student and cooperating teacher would work closely together, have positive sentiments for each other and work in a sharing rather than authority-determined fashion.
- Development of Self-Image: the student would come to see himself in a positive light and be resistant to external threat.
- Improved In-Class Performance: the reduction of friction between student and cooperating teacher would lead to better work on the part of both teachers.

Instruments

Schutz's FIRO package (10) was chosen for investigation of the first two hypotheses. FIRO-B measures three aspects of interpersonal behavior [Inclusion (I), Control (C) and Affection (A)] in terms of the degree to which each are Expressed (e) and Wanted (w) by the respondent. Thus, there are six subscales in all (e.g. A^w indicates affection wanted by the respondent).

The solidarity hypothesis was specified in terms of expected changes on the six subscales as detailed in Table 1:

Insert Table 1

About Here

COPE assesses the relative preference of the respondent for each of several coping mechanisms; the slef-image hypothesis was specified in terms of reduction in the use of the "turning against self" defense (Subscale T). From FIRO Theory (1) this reduction may be interpreted as an increase in self-esteem.

In-class performance was measured by the ratings of three disinterested observers who kept weekly logs on the performance of each student teacher including involvement and affective development. These logs were transformed into ratings of performance subject to inter-observer reliability.

Design

Two groups of 10 students and 10 cooperating teachers were employed. The treatment group was composed of those persons who were scheduled to take the autobiography seminar in their progression through the Training Complex; they engaged in the activities described above. A comparison group was assembled from 10 pairs of student and cooperating teachers who agreed to take an evening course which brought them together for an equal amount of time as in the autobiography seminar, (they heard lectures on the relation of the Social Sciences to the problems of education).

FIRO-B and COPE were administered in the first and twelfth week

of the semester. The average over observers of the first three and last three weeks of student-teaching ratings were taken respectively, as pre and post measures of in-class performance.

Analysis of Data

Each of the six subscales of FIRO-B was treated by a mixed ANOVA:

Between: Groups (Autobiography, Comparison)
Roles (Student, Teacher)

Within: Time (Pre, Post)

The "turning-against self" subscale of COPE and the ratings of in-class performance were only gathered on students; a simpler mixed ANOVA (groups and time) was used for this data.

Results

All ANOVA summaries are presented in Table 2. Since the Design is rather complicated, the cell means for each of the eight analyses are presented in Figure 1 to aid in interpretation.

Insert Table 2

And Figure 1

About Here

Solidarity Hypothesis

The results indicate differences in the overall interpersonal relations behavior (as measured by FIRO-B) between the student teachers and cooperating teachers with a significant main effect of Roles in five of the six analyses.

The results show significant interactions between Groups and Time and among Groups, Roles and Time; comparison of the ANOVA summary with the direction of changes portrayed in Figure 1 indicates that the two treatments (a) had differential effects over time and (b) had their major effects on the students. For four of the analyses, the time changes were diametrically opposite for student teachers in the Autobiography and Comparison groups. (This is particularly evident for both control subscales). The averaging effects of these opposing changes are an explanation of the varying pattern of interactions between Time or Groups and Roles. These results are also evidence against the possibility of pretreatment differences between the groups.

Reference to Table 1 shows that the qualitative nature of the changes over time for students in the Autobiography group confirmed five of the six expectations while changes shown by students in the comparison group confirmed none of these.

Thus, both the quanitiative and qualitative information indicate that the autobiography treatment was successful in producing changes consistent with the definition of solidarity adopted for the study.

Self-Image Hypothesis

A significant main effect of groups coupled with significant interaction of Groups and Time was observed. Reference to Figure 1 shows that the Autobiography student teachers experienced a large decline in the use of the "Turning Against Self" defense while use in the comparison group increased. These opposite qualitative effects are consistent with the expectations in Table 1 and also explain the lack of a main effect of time due to averaging. These data support the effectiveness of the Autobiography

treatment in developing the self-image of the student teacher.

In-Class Performance

The data, collected only on student teachers show significant main effects for both groups and time and also a significant interaction between the two. Reference to Figure 1 shows that the Autobiography group exhibited a large increase in rated in-class performance while the comparison group showed a small increase. This is consistent with the claims of the autobiography treatment, with regard to its beneficial effects on classroom teaching.

Conclusions and Implications

The data indicate that the autobiography treatment developed at Clark University is a potential solution to the problem of affective friction between student and cooperating teacher. It is a low cost option which may be built on top of existing seminars which involve the two groups (the National Survey of Student-Teaching (5) revealed that approximately 45% of the institutions used such seminars). The study is limited in that it did not compare Autobiography with ogher "sensitivity" or group process activities.

The results are sufficiently strong to indicate that further research in this area would be profitable. The technique might be extended to other clinical experiences in which a neophyte must interact with an experienced professional (e.g. psychology, medicine, law).

FOOTNOTES

1. This work was supported, in part, by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Bureau of Education Professions Development.

2. The Trainers of Teacher Trainers (T.T.T.) Program was funded under the Education Professions Development Act and Administered by BEPD. It began in 1969 and was terminated in 1973. It had the major goal of bringing new resources to bear on the problems of teacher education, particularly those in Arts and Sciences departments.

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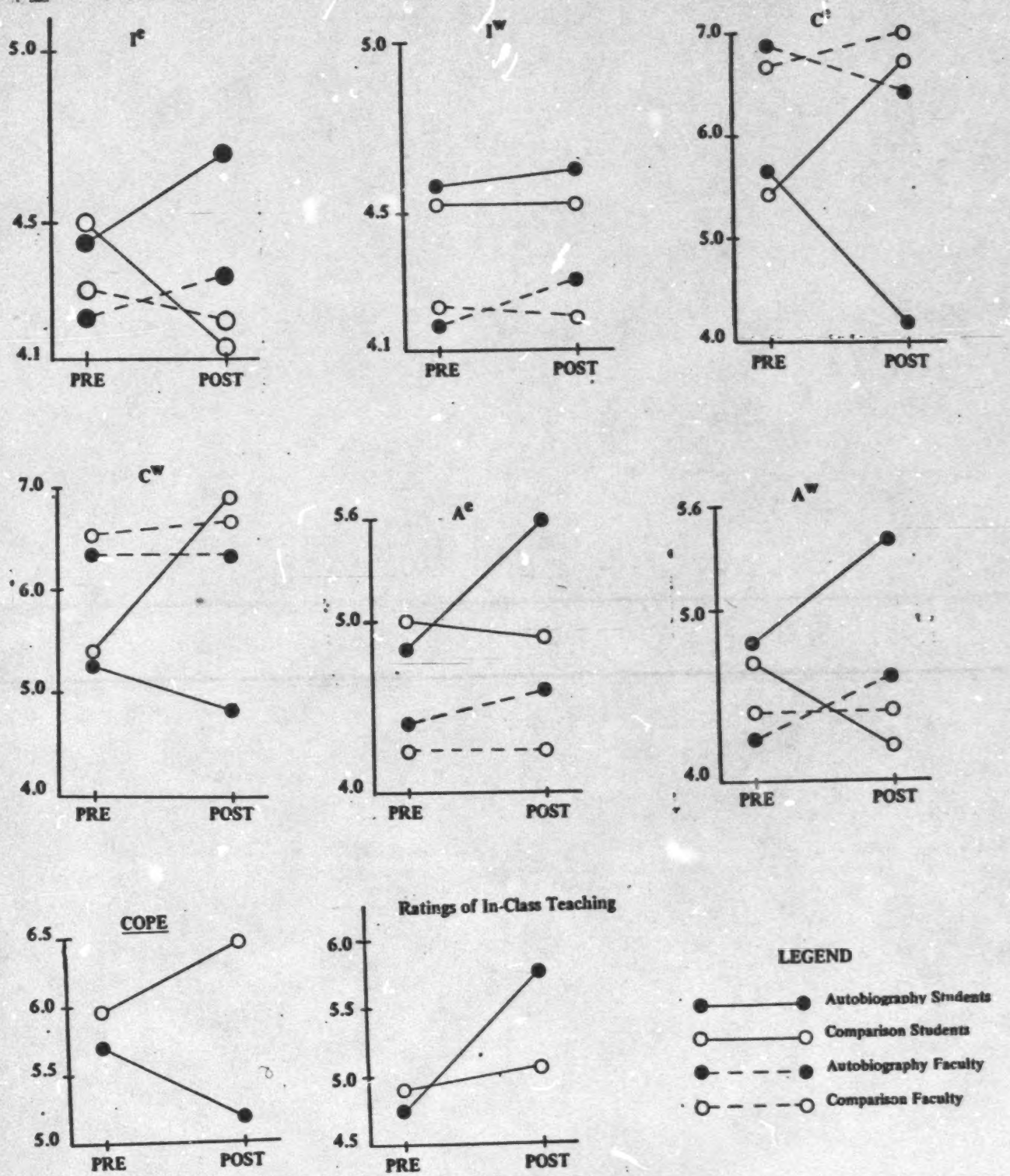
FIGURE 1


I^e
5.0
4.5
4.1
PRE
POST
I^w
5.0
4.5
4.1
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C^e
7.0
6.0
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PRE
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5.6
5.0
4.0
PRE
POST
COPE
6.5
6.0
5.5
5.0
PRE
POST
Ratings of In-Class Teaching
6.0
5.5
5.0
4.5
PRE
POST
LEGEND
Autobiography Students
Comparison Students
Autobiography Faculty
Comparison Faculty

TABLE I

And Observed

Predicted Changes Derived From

Autobiography Theory

Scale	Expected Change	Observed Changes *	
		Autobiography Group	Comparison Group
I^e	Increase	Increase	Decrease
I^w	Increase	No Change	No Change
C^e	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
C^w	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
A^e	Increase	Increase	No Change
A^w	Increase	Increase	Decrease
COPE	Decrease	Decrease	Increase
Ratings of Teaching	Increase	Increase	No Change

*cf: Figure 1., These changes observed only in student teachers.

TABLE 2

Analyses of Variance in the

Evaluation of the Autobiography Technique

a. Analysis of Variance for the Subscales of FIRO-B

Source of Variance	DF	I^e SSQ	I^e F	I^v SSQ	I^v F	C^e SSQ	C^e F	C^v SSQ	C^v F	A^e SSQ	A^e F	A^v SSQ	A^v F
Total	79	632.10		602.36		798.54		872.97		773.70		695.22	
Between S	39	122.00		123.53		159.69		172.38		152.55		145.35	
Groups (G)	1	9.36	3.65	5.18	1.87	15.03	4.69*	16.11	4.56*	12.05	3.67	13.60	4.61*
Roles (R)	1	10.74	4.19	11.41	4.12*	13.81	4.31*	14.56	4.12*	13.83	4.21*	12.18	4.13*
G x R	1	9.59	3.74	7.23	2.61	15.48	4.83*	14.49	4.10*	8.44	2.57	13.36	4.53*
S/GR	36	92.31		99.71		115.37		127.22		118.15		549.87	
Within S	40	510.10		478.83		638.85		700.60		621.15		549.87	
Time (T)	1	20.90	2.01	21.97	2.21	41.82	3.57	49.74	3.96	35.71	2.98	23.15	2.17
G x T	1	43.25	4.16*	39.47	3.97	81.17	6.93*	89.18	7.10**	54.16	4.52*	55.06	5.16*
R x T	1	24.54	2.36	28.44	2.86	44.16	3.77	53.63	4.27*	44.69	3.73	42.47	3.98
G x R x T	1	47.09	4.53*	31.02	3.12	50.02	4.27*	55.89	4.45*	55.24	4.61*	45.03	4.22*
ST/GR		374.32		357.93		521.68		452.16		541.35		384.13	

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

b. Analysis of Variance for COPE and Ratings of In-Class Performance

Source of Variance	DF	COPE SSQ	COPE F	Ratings SSQ	Ratings F
Total	39	132.57		199.22	
Between S	19	32.95		49.16	
Groups (G)	1	6.64	4.54*	10.49	4.89*
S/G	18	26.31		38.67	
Within S	20	99.62		150.06	
Time (T)	1	13.78	3.65	27.49	5.31*
G x T	1	17.86	4.73*	29.36	5.67*
ST/G	18	67.98		93.21	

* $p < .05$